

Applicant Name Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Project Name Snowshoe Mine Reclamation

Project Abstract

The Snowshoe Mine site, an abandoned hardrock mine, is ranked ninth on DEQ's Abandoned Hardrock Mine Priority Sites List. The Snowshoe Mine includes mill tailings and waste rock located within the floodplain of Snowshoe Creek. The uncontained waste material impacts water and sediment quality in Snowshoe Creek. The contamination from heavy metals is not limited to, but includes, arsenic (As), cadmium (Cd), copper (Cu), Lead (Pb), and zinc (Zn). Mining at the Snowshoe produced lead, silver, and gold; it has been inactive since the 1960s.

The Snowshoe Mine (T 28 N, R 31 W, Sec. 7) is approximately 16.5 miles southeast of Libby, in Lincoln County. It sits at the head of the Snowshoe Creek drainage, a tributary of Big Cherry Creek which flows into the Kootenai River. The nine-acre reclamation project lies within the Kootenai National Forest (KNF) and is adjacent to the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness Area. The majority of the site is located on patented claims; however, a small portion overlaps the KNF.

The DEQ in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (USFS) and the KNF, plans to remove the tailings from the banks of Snowshoe Creek and deposit them in a repository on KNF property. The largest of the four waste rock dumps will be treated in place and the remainder of the small waste dumps will be left as they are because of their inaccessibility. The goal of the project is to reduce or eliminate the impact to human health and the environment. Under the preferred reclamation alternative, human health risk will be reduced by 64% and ecological risk will be reduced by 83%, an average overall risk reduction of 74%.

The DEQ plans to develop the repository and construct access roads during the 2006 construction season; the DEQ will remove the tailings, cover the waste rock, and revegetate the site during 2007.